

Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2010

**Remarks at a Reception for Senator Barbara Boxer in San Francisco,
California**

May 25, 2010

The President. Hello, California! Thank you. You doing a little dance? Thank you. Thank you, everybody. Oh, thank you. Now, it is good to be back. But I resent I didn't get a chance to hear the choir sing. *[Laughter]* I was up somewhere. They were working me hard, and I could have used a little lift of the spirit there. *[Laughter]*

Now, fortunately, if I'm not mistaken, I recognize Reverend Williams, being here. I know he's sitting right in front. And I recognize this choir because I saw you guys a while back when I was here. So I have heard them in the past. To the Glide Methodist Church Choir, thank you so much. Reverend Williams, thank you. To musician Brett Dennen, thank you very much for helping out here.

Audience member. *[Inaudible]*

The President. Uh-oh, down—yeah, if you've got a chair, go ahead and use it. Feel free. Feel free. *[Laughter]*

It is wonderful to be back in California. It's also wonderful to be back in the home district of one of the greatest Speakers in the history of the House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi.

And it's good to be here in the home State of my friend, somebody who has been fighting the good fight for this State for so many years, and then you look at her and you realize she started when she was 12—*[laughter]*—your outstanding Senator, Barbara Boxer.

I talked to Stu, Barbara's husband, beforehand, and he told me that Barbara has not changed a bit since she first went to Congress—as beautiful as ever. The only difference is she was actually 5'10"—*[laughter]*—when she went there——

Sen. Boxer. That's true.

The President. ——and just got worn down. *[Laughter]*

Sen. Boxer. Worn down, but strong as ever.

The President. But—that's okay, I didn't have any gray hair when I went there. *[Laughter]*

Sen. Boxer. Mr. President, mine turned blonde.

The President. Right, yours turned blonde. *[Laughter]*

Now, it is one of the great privileges of having been a Senator that I had a chance to work alongside Barbara. California has been a leader in promoting hybrids and compact cars and cleaner-burning fuels. And appropriately, you've got Senator Barbara Boxer, a subcompact Senator—*[laughter]*—with a seemingly inexhaustible source of energy. *[Laughter]* And she already talked about how deeply she cares about the environment, about her work to pursue a clean energy future. And that work has never been more important than it is now. But I also want you to understand, this is a woman with extraordinarily deep passion to fight for all of you on a whole range of issues.

Audience member. *[Inaudible]*

The President. Absolutely. [*Laughter*] Barbara is somebody who hasn't forgotten why she went to Washington. She remembers the people of California, the stories she's heard, the people she's talked to: the woman without health insurance; the child who is in a substandard school; the guy who's lost his job.

That's what she's passionate about—especially right now—fighting for jobs, jobs right here in California, jobs with good wages, jobs with good benefits. She's passionate for fighting for California's families and making sure that everybody here has got a fair shake, that if they're willing to work hard, that they can reach for that American Dream.

And that's what I want to talk to you about tonight, because reviving our economy remains the central challenge that we're facing today. I don't have to tell you folks here in California. This State has been hit as hard as any State with economic troubles over the past few years. And jobs have been lost in heartbreaking numbers up and down the coast. Housing crisis hit the State with a vengeance. Budget problems have put a further strain on people here at a time when they really need help, and that forces the State government to make painful choices about where to spend, where to save.

The challenges here reflect challenges that are facing people all across America. I'm trying to get out of Washington once a week. [*Laughter*] It's good for me. I mean, there are good things about Washington. I've got no commute—[*laughter*]—which I know you'll appreciate here in California. [*Laughter*] But it's good to get out of town, and you talk to everybody, you see the letters that are being sent, and I'm reminded, first of all, of what we confronted when we got here, when we got into office. Seven hundred and fifty thousand jobs per month being lost—750,000. The economy was contracting at 6.5 percent that quarter that I was sworn in, the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression.

Now, you've heard that said before, but think about that. Think about that. This is the worst economic crisis that many of the people in this room have seen in their lifetimes. And the fact is, is that a lot of folks didn't know what to do. And there were some economists who said that we may be falling over a precipice: The banking sector had completely locked up, no credit was flowing, and we might end up seeing a global depression that rivaled what happened in the 1930s.

And so we had to act quickly. We had to act fast. And unfortunately, we didn't have all the tools that we needed to act fast because you had a previous Congress and a previous administration that had left a \$1.3 trillion deficit, wrapped up in a bow, that turned surpluses into deficits as a consequence of a whole host of irresponsible policies.

These problems that we confronted didn't come out of nowhere. They didn't just happen. There was a consequence of policies that had been in place for years, that Barbara's opponents, that the other party had promoted. And so we had to move fast, and that's what we did.

On day one, we took the reins, and we said, we are going to make sure that we don't slip into a great depression. And we are——

Audience member. Move faster on "don't ask, don't tell"!

Audience members. Boo!

The President. It's good to see you again.

Audience members. Yes we can! Yes we can! Yes we can!

The President. Thank you.

I have to say, you know, I saw this guy down in L.A.—[*laughter*]—at a Barbara Boxer event about a month and a half ago. And I would—two points I want to make. Number one, he should—I hate to say this, but he really should, like, buy a ticket to—if he wants to demonstrate—buy a ticket to a guy who doesn't support his point of view. [*Laughter*] And then you can yell as much as you want there.

The other point is, maybe he didn't read the newspapers—[*laughter*]—because we are working with Congress, as we speak, to roll back "don't ask, don't tell." I actually think he does read the newspapers because he wasn't as—his heart didn't seem in it. [*Laughter*] He said, do it faster. It's like, come on, man, I'm dealing with Congress here. [*Laughter*] It takes a little bit of time. [*Laughter*]

Where was I? [*Laughter*] I was going down memory lane. [*Laughter*] So we ended up initiating a series of steps: the largest investment in clean energy in our history; restoring the primacy of science and investing in research and development; the largest investment in infrastructure since Eisenhower built the interstate railway system; the largest investment in education by the Federal Government in our history; the most progressive tax cut in our history to restore a sense of fairness to our tax system; help for States so that they didn't have to lay off teachers and firefighters and police officers, including right here in California. Talk to Governor Schwarzenegger if you don't believe the kinds of help that was involved. And we did all this in the first month—the first month.

And just as an aside, we passed legislation to make sure that 4 million kids could get health insurance that didn't have it before. We passed the Lilly Ledbetter law that put forward the basic principle that an equal's day—that a day's work should get an equal day's pay, regardless of whether it's a man or a woman who is doing the work. Made sure tobacco companies couldn't market to kids. Made sure that we have the toughest credit card antifraud provisions that we had seen, anti-housing fraud provisions, biggest national service investment, all that we did in the first few months.

Now—and that was before we got to health care to make sure that every American had the chance to get decent health care and people weren't going bankrupt when they got sick.

Audience members. Thank you.

The President. You're welcome.

Audience members. Thank you.

The President. You're welcome. It's nice to feel appreciated once in a while. [*Applause*] Thank you.

So—now, here's the thing, though—

Audience member. We love you, Obama!

The President. I love you back. But here's the thing, California: We've still got work to do. Because of those folks that I talked about—unemployment in California and all across the country is still unacceptably high. People are still losing their homes. Folks are still seeing premium increases on their health care. And we've got some big issues that Congress hasn't yet tackled in the way that we know they have to be tackled if we want a better future for our kids and our grandkids.

Now, some of you heard I went to the Republican caucus today. It was a warm and cuddly meeting. [*Laughter*] The last time I appeared, it was before the House Republican caucus, and

we agreed to let the press in on that one; this one, not so much. [*Laughter*] And—but I wanted to talk to them about the fact that as busy as people have been, as hard as we've been working, we've got more work to do. And everybody knows it in their gut. Everybody knows that we are at an inflection point in our history, that we've got a choice between going back to the same status quo—except the status quo won't work any more. We're not going to be able to run an economy based on maxing out your credit cards and taking out home equity loans and running up debt and the financial sector getting exorbitant profits based on a bunch of financial shenanigans.

We know that if we want to build a real future in an economy this competitive—with China and India and Brazil and other countries on the rise—that we're going to have to go back to basics. We've got to fix our education system. We've got to make sure that every young person in America has a chance to go to college. We've got to make sure—and by the way, you may have missed it during the health care debate, but we added billions of dollars in funding to student loans by cutting out the financial middlemen. That was just—that didn't even get front-page news. We've got to strengthen our community colleges. We're going to have work to do implementing our health care bill. And we've also got some critical issues that all of us have in mind right now. And I'm going to mention two—and I mentioned these to the Republican caucus.

Said the first is energy. Now, there's not a person here who has just felt that sense of despair in watching the broadcasts about the oil spill down in the Gulf. Nobody is more upset than me, because ultimately, like any President, when this happens on your watch, then every day you are thinking, how does this get solved?

And so we've sent over a thousand people down to the Gulf—boom, equipment, legal advisers, helping fishermen who have lost their livelihoods as a consequence of this. And we are now having to do a thoroughgoing review to see how it is that oil companies can say that they know how to handle these problems when it turns out actually that they don't. And that's a responsibility of Government.

But we also have to face a broader fact. There's a reason why those folks are out there drilling a mile down in the water, and then when they hit ground a mile down, they have to go another mile down to get oil. That's an expensive proposition; it's a dangerous proposition; it's a risky proposition. Why are we doing it? Well, we're doing it because we have not made a transition to a new energy future.

And we've been putting it off for decade after decade after decade. And it is about time that we said to ourselves that we're ready to make a change on behalf of the future of our children and our grandchildren. And it won't happen overnight. It won't happen tomorrow. It won't happen next week. But if we start investing in clean energy technology and solar and wind and biodiesel, if we invest in hybrid plug-ins that can get 150 miles a gallon, if we start making our buildings more efficient, and if we start finally saying to ourselves, we can't just let everybody pollute for free, if we follow science and we follow some commonsense principles, then, look, oil is still going to be in the energy mix. We're not going to eliminate that completely, but we are going to, over time, transition to ourselves, and we will become more energy efficient, which will be good for our national security, it will be good for our economy, it will be good for our environment, it will be good for our future.

And by the way, we can create millions of jobs right here in the United States of America investing in a new clean energy future. And I told the Republicans, I am ready to work with you right now to get this done.

Second issue is immigration. Now, folks are out there looking at the Arizona law, and it's divided the country.

Audience members. Boo!

The President. Now, I've been very clear. I think the Arizona law was a mistake. And my Justice Department is looking very carefully at the nature of this law.

But I understand the frustrations of folks in Arizona. The fact of the matter is, is that for decades, we keep on talking about solving the problems of the border and we don't. Truth of the matter is, is that you've got hundreds of thousands of undocumented workers coming over the border, and that gets people stressed. You've got employers who are exploiting undocumented workers all across America, actively recruiting them and often taking advantage of them when they get here.

So there is a whole bunch of work that has to be done. But we can't solve the problem by playing politics. We can't solve the problem by demagoguing the issue.

And so what I told my Republican colleagues is, look, I'll be there with you in terms of securing the border. That's part of my responsibility as Commander in Chief and as President. But you've got to meet me on solving the problem long term. It's not enough to just talk about National Guard down at the border. You've got to talk about how are we going to hold employers accountable and how are we going to take the folks who are living in the shadows right now and say to them, you've got a responsibility, you'll have to pay a fine, you'll have to pay back-taxes, you'll have to learn English, but we are going to give you a pathway in order for you to be a part of this community legally. That is something we've got to work on together.

Now, California, the last thing I said to my Republican colleagues was, you don't even have to meet me halfway. *[Laughter]* I'll bring most Democrats on these issues. I'm just looking for 8 or 10 of you—*[laughter]*—you know? I mean, the time—the day has passed when I expected this to be a full partnership. I mean, it's just—*[laughter]*—you know, I understand the strategy of sitting on the sidelines. And let's face it: Politically, it hasn't been bad for them. It made a lot of people forget how we got into this mess in the first place, just sitting there and saying no to everything.

Sen. Boxer. *[Inaudible]*

The President. Well, Barbara points out—I've said this before—you know, folks—here you got folks driving a car in the ditch, and then we're out there in the mud pulling the car out of the ditch, and they're sitting there comfortable, drinking on a Slurpee or something—*[laughter]*—and saying, "You know, you're not pulling the car out of the ditch fast enough." *[Laughter]* "You're not doing that the right way. When you put your shoulder behind, you got to lean into it." *[Laughter]*

So then we finally get the car out of the ditch, and they want the keys back. *[Laughter]*

Audience members. No!

The President. Say, no, you can't have the keys. You can't—you don't know how to drive. You can't have the keys. Can't have them. If you want to get in, we'll give you a ride. *[Laughter]* But we're not going to let you drive.

Audience member. No keys. *[Laughter]*

The President. No keys. No, you don't get the keys back. *[Laughter]*

But here's my point, look—and then after the meeting, we got some of the usual stuff about, well, he talks about bipartisanship, but we don't really see partisanship in the financial regulatory bill, you know, it just passed with mostly Democratic votes, few Republican votes to break the filibuster.

Look, understand this about bipartisanship: I have a track record in my legislative career of working with folks across the aisle. And I also, by the way, am sympathetic to the fact that it's hard for Republicans to work with me right now because there are members of their base who, if somebody even smiles at me, they think, you're a traitor. *[Laughter]* You smiled at Obama. *[Laughter]* You're nice to him. You were polite. And if you're rude to Obama, we can raise money. *[Laughter]* So the incentive structure right now for cooperation within the Republican Party is not real strong. So I'm sympathetic to that.

But when we talk about bipartisanship, what we mean is, is that there's going to be some negotiation, and, no, the Republicans aren't going to get their way on everything. And there are going to be some times where we disagree. And when we disagree, if we're not doing everything the way they want and they say, I'm going to take my ball and go home, and I won't vote for anything, that's not a failure of bipartisanship on our part. There's got to be some give on the other side, particularly when you drove the car into the ditch.

You know, we can't just go back to business as usual. So on immigration, meet me a quarter of the way. *[Laughter]* We'll deal with border security issues, and I'll be serious about it. And by the way, sometimes I'll get attacked in my own base, right. Because sometimes some of the things I've done, some of you guys aren't happy with.

But what I said to them today was, if I'm willing to make decisions that aren't always comfortable for me politically, I need you to make some decisions that aren't always comfortable for you politically.

And if they're willing to do that, we can get immigration reform done. And it needs to be done—comprehensive immigration reform. And if they are willing to do it, we can get an energy package that puts us on the path to a clean energy future.

So I remain hopeful. Remember hope?

Audience members. Yeah!

The President. I know it's been 18 tough months. And I know I've got more gray hair. *[Laughter]* I know some folks say, "Well, you know, he's not as cool as he was." *[Laughter]* When they had all the posters around and everything—now I've got a Hitler mustache on the posters. *[Laughter]* That's quite a change. *[Laughter]*

You know, my approval ratings kind of start sinking. And some people are just not entirely satisfied. "You know what? The health care bill wasn't everything I wanted. It's the biggest deal since Medicare, but, you know"—*[laughter]*—"it wasn't everything I wanted."

Look, I understand that, but remember what the campaign was about: hope, change. People weren't paying attention to me when I said, change is hard. People—a lot of folks, they just missed that part. *[Laughter]* They were like, hope, change—*[laughter]*—and they thought, nice swearing-in, you got Bruce Springsteen singing. *[Laughter]* Everybody is feeling good. This is going to happen fast. *[Laughter]*

Well, no. If it was easy, it would've happened before. If it was easy, we would have put in place mileage standards on cars 30 years ago, 40 years ago, 50 years ago—on trucks. We didn't do it because it's hard.

And it's hard not just because of the special interests, although they're there, but it's also hard because, you know what, everybody gets kind of comfortable with the devil they know. And change can be scary. And people can be frightened. And issues can be demagogued. And the talking head media debate can get everybody confused and cynical and feeling like, you know what, nothing is changing.

The fact of the matter is, over the last year and a half, we have moved this country in powerful ways. And the reason we've been able to do it is because I've had a partner, Barbara Boxer of California, who has fought with me and marched with me and held hands with me. And if you want to see that change happen for the next 18 months and the next 18 months after that and the next 18 months after that, well, then doggone it, reelect Barbara Boxer to be your United States Senator.

Thank you very much, everybody. God bless you. God bless America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:53 p.m. at the Fairmont San Francisco Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Rev. Cecil Williams, founder and minister of liberation, Glide Memorial United Methodist Church, San Francisco, CA. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on May 26.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Senator Barbara Boxer, reception in San Francisco, CA.

Locations: San Francisco, CA.

Names: Boxer, Barbara; Boxer, Stewart; Dennen, Brett; Pelosi, Nancy; Schwarzenegger, Arnold A.; Springsteen, Bruce; Williams, Cecil.

Subjects: Arizona : Illegal immigration enforcement legislation; Armed Forces, U.S. : "Don't ask, don't tell" policy, proposed repeal; Armed Forces, U.S. : National Guard; Budget, Federal : Deficit; Business and industry : Credit Card Accountability Responsibility and Disclosure Act of 2009; Business and industry : Credit freeze situation; Business and industry : Global competitiveness; Business and industry : Illegal immigrant labor, reduction efforts; California : Democratic Party events; California : Energy :: Alternative and renewable sources and technologies; California : Governor; California : Housing market, decline; California : Job creation and growth; California : Job losses; California : President's visits; California : Recession, effects; California : Unemployment rate; Civil rights : Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act of 2009; Civil rights : Wage equality; Congress : Bipartisanship; Congress : House of Representatives :: Republican caucus; Congress : House of Representatives :: Speaker; Congress : Senate :: Republican caucus; Defense and national security : Border security; Economy, national : Economic concerns; Economy, national : Recession, effects; Economy, national : Strengthening efforts; Education : Postsecondary education :: Community colleges; Education : Postsecondary education :: Student loans, elimination of subsidies to private providers; Education : Reform legislation, proposed; Education, Department of : Funding; Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act; Employment and unemployment : Job creation and growth; Employment and unemployment : Job losses; Employment and unemployment : Unemployment rate; Energy : Alternative and renewable sources and technologies; Energy : Alternative energy products and technologies, U.S. production; Energy : Biofuels and ethanol; Energy : Energy legislation, proposed; Energy : Energy-efficient homes and buildings; Energy

: Offshore oil and gas drilling; Energy : Solar and wind energy; Environment : Oil spills :: Corporate responsibility; Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act of 2009; Gulf of Mexico : Deepwater Horizon oil spill :: Economic effects and recovery efforts; Gulf of Mexico : Deepwater Horizon oil spill :: Environmental effects and cleanup efforts; Health and Human Services, Department of : State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP); Health and medical care : Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act; Health Care and Education Reconciliation Act of 2010; Housing : Foreclosure rates; Housing : Fraud Enforcement and Recovery Act of 2009; Immigration and naturalization : Citizenship; Immigration and naturalization : Illegal immigration; Immigration and naturalization : Reform; Legislation, proposed : "Restoring American Financial Stability Act of 2010"; Legislation, proposed : "Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act of 2009"; Science and technology : Research and development; Taxation : Tax Code :: Reform; Taxation : Tax relief; Transportation : High-speed rail lines, development and expansion; Transportation : Highway system, modernization efforts; Transportation : Mass transit and rail infrastructure, improvement efforts.

DCPD Number: DCPD201000419.